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SUBJECT: SOUTH KOREANS' SHOCK AND GRIEF OVER THE VIRGINIA
TECH MASSACRE

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: From all indications, South Koreans were shocked, saddened, and sorry about the mass murder at Virginia Tech by South Korean national Cho Seung-hui. South Koreans -- ranging from ordinary citizens to the President -- have expressed their condolences to the victims and their families and even apologized for the actions of one of their own. Post has received a number of condolence letters, emails, and flowers. The Virginia Tech tragedy dominated the media here this week, with some voices describing a fear of backlash against Korea and Korean-Americans. END SUMMARY.

KOREANS' OUTPOURING OF SYMPATHY

12. (SBU) A number of high-ranking South Koreans have expressed their condolences to the victims and their families of this tragedy, including Foreign Minister Song Min-soon and Defense Minister Kim Jang-soo. President Roh expressed "tremendous shock and grief" at a news conference; President Roh also issued a letter to President Bush expressing condolences for the incident. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo went so far as to apologize for Cho's actions, saying that the people of South Korea were "sorry for the actions of that person from a moral standpoint." Post received condolence letters from former President Kim Dae-jung, GNP Chair Kang Jae-sup, GNP presidential candidate Park Geun-hye and GNP lawmaker Park Jin, as well as a phone call from presidential candidate Sohn Hak-kyu. In addition, three National Assembly members from the Uri Party, Yoo Jae-kun, Suh Hae-suk, and Lee Eun-young, and the President of the Korea-America Friendship Society, Amb. Park Keun, all visited the Embassy to personally express their condolences to CDA Stanton. All of the major political parties in Korea issued statements expressing their condolences for the tragic incident at Virginia Tech and expressed hope that this incident would not develop into a bilateral issue given the nationality of the suspect.

13. (U) The Embassy has received fourteen condolence letters as of April 20, four bouquets of flowers, and numerous phone calls from NGOs, individuals, and clubs. In addition, Cafe USA, Embassy Seoul's online community, received dozens of condolence messages from "netizens." On a tree across the street from the chancery, a Korean created a makeshift memorial with a "VT" logo and several black ribbons. There was a candlelight vigil near the Chancery on April 18, and

another one is scheduled for April 21. Myeongdong Cathedral had a special mass for the victims on April 19, and set up a dedicated shrine for them. In addition, the Christian Council of Korea (CCK) announced that April 19-25 would be a Memorial Week for the Virginia Tech victims, during which it has requested that churches and Christian organizations across the ROK pray for the victims families. It is also organizing a month-long fundraising period in collaboration with the Kookmin Ilbo newspaper and other organizations.

AMERICAN VIEW

14. (U) The massacre, and the fact that the killer was technically South Korean, dominated the media. (NOTE: Cho was a legal permanent resident of the U.S. END NOTE.) After the initial news reports, there were articles about fear of backlash against Korean-Americans and of damage of the bilateral relationship. However, on April 20, alongside articles describing the content of Cho's package to NBC News, were articles and letters to the editor from Americans who wanted to assure Koreans that they did not blame them for Cho's actions. The Korea Herald had a special sidebar article of Letters to the Editor, which contained excerpts from 12 Americans it had received. Most of the letters expressed appreciation for the apologies, but said that they and feelings of shame were misplaced. They recognized that this was the act of one disturbed individual, and nationality was irrelevant. Similarly, on April 20, the Korea Times had a front-page article entitled, "Americans Show Understanding Over Koreans' Backlash Worry," that quoted from several letters and emails it had received with similar sentiment.

15. (SBU) Post received several emails from Americans expressing the same feelings, asking Post to broadcast this message to the Korean people. Out of 10 emails received, only one demanded that the South Korean president should apologize for the tragedy. In our dealings with contacts, we have emphasized that while we appreciate the Koreans' expressions of sympathy, we do not regard the Virginia Tech tragedy as a Korean or a bilateral issue.
STANTON